

Ithaca Journal

Estimated printed pages: 3

July 24, 2004

Section: Local

Page: 1A

Emerson warns residents

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Company: 9 test sites show contamination

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ITHACA - Soil vapor testing in neighborhoods downhill from **Emerson** Power Transmission has detected contaminants at nine different sites, according to a flier distributed to residents Friday.

That communication came from the company. The State Department of Environmental Conservation confirmed the findings to The Journal in a telephone interview - minus statistics indicating pollution levels.

"I'm outraged," South Cayuga Street resident Joyce Muchan said after receiving the handout. "I think that I should have a right to these numbers as a homeowner. I think it is irresponsible for them not to give them to me."

According to the flier, her street showed some of the highest pollutant concentrations. What it doesn't disclose is how high the concentrations were.

Emerson spokesman Dave Baldrige said he was unable to provide more specific answers beyond the information contained in the flier, adding that residents will have a chance to ask questions and learn more at two public information sessions, planned for Aug. 4.

DEC Region 7 Engineer Mary Jane Peachey said she did not have statistics for the test readings immediately available Friday, but referred to them as above "background levels."

"What that tells us, simply, is that there are vapors at that point, and we need to define the whole vapor plume," Peachey said. And that, she said, requires more testing.

Emerson's handout indicates that volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, were found in the soil gas at sampling sites on South Hill Terrace, South Cayuga Street and "to a lesser extent" on South Geneva Street. The highest concentrations were found on South Cayuga Street.

Peachey said additional tests will include soil gas sampling and indoor air quality tests in neighboring homes. **Emerson** is scheduled to submit a work plan for those tests by Friday, she added. After DEC approves that plan, **Emerson** will contact certain residents and property owners seeking permission to do testing on their property.

"The fact that you are asked for permission to test within your house does not mean that the air within your house is being affected," the flier read. Peachey said residents are under no obligation to permit testing. Neither Peachey nor Baldrige could say how many homes might have to be tested.

Emerson also will submit a second work plan for additional groundwater investigations, which will consist of installing and sampling shallow monitoring wells in the area.

The primary VOCs detected are Trichloroethylene, or TCE, and perchloroethylene. Prior to 1983, the factory's former owners used TCE, an organic solvent, to strip grease from chains and other metal parts. In 1987, **Emerson** discovered that TCE had leaked into the surrounding soil and groundwater, and notified state officials.

A groundwater treatment system has been in place at the plant since 1991, and was approved by the DEC in 1994. Concerns about whether the "pump-and-treat" process was working properly led to the recent round of soil gas testing, which was done

in June.

Peachey said the DEC is working with **Emerson** to encourage "more aggressive" remediation work on the factory's own property. TCE apparently leaked downhill from an underground fire water reservoir on the site. That reservoir was reportedly decontaminated early in the clean-up process.

Walter Hang, president of Ithaca-based Toxics Targeting, a private consulting firm, believes one obstacle to a proper cleanup is procedural. Currently, the **Emerson** TCE spill is classed as a "four," which means that an approved remediation plan is in place and is being monitored.

"The linchpin" to proper cleanup, Hang said, "is to reclassify the site from a four to a two." Peachey confirmed that a reclassification is "under consideration," adding that state Department of Health backing is required for such a move.

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